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Sex and the Sandinistas: An Official Attack on U.S. Reporters?

IN A BIZARRE ATTEMPT TO discredit American reporters covering Nicaragua, a right-wing group and a Reagan-administration official are claiming that some journalists are being seduced by Sandinista prostitutes into supporting the Managua government.

The claim appears in the July newsletter of Accuracy in Media, under the byline of Daniel James, a controversial journalist who was once accused in a New York Times story of disseminating CIA "disinformation." "The Sandinista regime goes to great lengths to cultivate these reporters," James writes. "One of the oldest methods is to see that the

bachelors among them are suitably accompanied by trusted Sandinista females."

James insists his AIM story is entirely from unofficial sources. Still, *New York* learned that among those interviewed for it was Otto Reich, who, as the administration's media point man for Latin America, has questioned the patriotism of reporters who don't toe the official line. Reich told *New York* he has it from "defectors from the Sandinista government" that "it isn't only women" who are provided. For gay reporters, there are Sandinista men, he said. "This thing is sordid."

It is also untrue, say representatives of leading newspa-

pers and wire services, though they concede that some free-lancers in Nicaragua are pro-Sandinista.

The *Washington Post's* special correspondent in Nicaragua, John Lantigua, is cited by James as among those having a "Nicaraguan live-in." Lantigua recently married an American Agence France-Presse photographer with whom he has been living for the past six years.

The article also cites a "confidential memo" to a Sandinista comandante that claims Lantigua tried to persuade a Nicaraguan exile to "accept" the Sandinistas. Reich made a similar allegation, without naming Lantigua, at a spring meeting

with U.S. newspaper editors.

Washington Post assistant managing editor Jim Hoagland said he assumed the memo in question was one read in part to a *Post* editor by a Central America expert who has received favorable mention from James. "It was not supported by the facts," Hoagland said.

Another journalist the newsletter criticizes for "pro-Sandinista" reporting is the *New York Times's* Stephen Kinzer. Coincidentally, he's a co-author of a 1982 book, *Bitter Fruit*, that accused James of writing an apologia for a CIA-orchestrated coup, for a publishing house that was a CIA "conduit."